

Boil Water Alerts----Information for Water System Operators

When a water system is placed on a "boil water alert" by the State Health Department, or issues a self imposed "boil water alert", there are usually many questions that arise. This document was prepared to answer most of these questions so that the water system operator/official can prepare and respond when necessary.

1. Who issues "boil water alerts"?

Boil water alerts can be issued by the Mississippi State Department of Health's Division of Water Supply (DWS) or by the officials of the water system (self imposed). In most cases, it is preferred that the water system officials issue the alert. However, if there is a significant threat to public health, or if the water system has failed to take the initiative in potentially hazardous situations, or if the water system needs assistance in getting the notice out, the DWS will issue the alert/order.

2. When are boil water alerts necessary or required?

The State Department of Health's Division of Water Supply will issue a boil water alert when the following occurs:

- * When a water system incurs an Acute Coliform Violation (E.Coli); or
- * When a preponderance of the samples collected are total coliform positive (TC+) or E. Coli positive (EC+); or
- * When a water system loses pressure or the system is compromised and there is a significant probability that contamination can or will enter the potable water supply, and the water system officials have not issued the alert themselves.

A water system should issue a self imposed boil water alert when:

- * the system loses pressure on all or part of the system, or
- * the system is compromised and there is the possibility that all or part of the water system can or will become contaminated.

3. What do the boil water alerts need to say?

The language included in a boil water alert depends on the situation. See the attached examples for different situations. Regardless of the circumstances, the language should be factual, concise, and easily understood.

4. If the water system needs to issue a boil water alert, what are the steps?

First, contact the Division of Water Supply, Compliance Branch, at (601) 960-7518 to let them know what is going on. Next, depending on the severity of the situation, you should contact those affected. If you only have a few customers on one street that were out of water because of a main break, notify them by personal contact, door-hangers, or notes taped to their doors. If a large part (or all) of the water system is affected, then you have to get the word out through the media. Contact the radio stations, television stations, and newspapers that serve your area. Offer to fax a

copy of the alert (news release) to them if you can. If you need assistance with the news media, the DWS can issue the news release for you. We have a very efficient system for getting boil water alerts to the appropriate news media.

5. What should the water system do to get the boil water alert rescinded or released?

Again, this depends on why the system was placed on boil water alert. If the system lost pressure, as soon as pressure is restored - adequately flush the affected distribution system. After flushing, check to insure that there is adequate chlorine residual throughout the distribution system. When satisfied that system pressure will be maintained and there is adequate chlorine residual, begin sampling.

Samples should be representative of the affected area. Every system should collect a minimum of two samples for the first 25 connections affected, another sample for the next seventy-five connections. In addition to this minimum, collect one sample for every additional 100 connections affected. For example, if the system had 300 connections affected by the pressure loss, then they would need to collect a minimum of five (5) samples (three for the first 100 connections, plus two for the remaining 200 connections). If the system had 1000 connections affected (3000 people) then they would need to collect a minimum of 12 samples (three for the first 100 connections, plus nine for the remaining 900 connections).

The following is a quick reference chart

Connections affected	Minimum number of samples
01-25	2
25-100	3
100-200	4
200-300	5
300-400	6
400-500	7
500-600	8
600-700	9
700-800	10
800-900	11
900-1000	12

If the notice was issued in response to bad samples, and not loss of pressure, the water system

officials/operator(s) should attempt to determine the source of contamination and/or if the disinfection treatment process is working properly (checking chlorine residuals). Also, they should immediately begin collecting samples from the affected area. If the entire system is placed on "boil water" alert, then samples should be collected from sites representing the entire water system. If the boil water alert is issued because of an acute violation, DWS will give you explicit instructions on how many samples and where to take them.

6. How long do I have to sample?

You should take at least the minimum number of samples (based on the number of connections affected) each day until you get two (2) consecutive days where all of the samples collected are clear or "good". This means you may have to sample every day for several days in a row before you get two days in a row of good samples. Don't take samples for two days and then wait to see if they are going to be good. Keep sampling every day. You may be on your third or fourth day of sampling before the DWS gets the results from your first two days of sampling.

7. What form or card do I use to submit samples?

All samples submitted in response to a boil water alert should be sent with a 426 card ONLY (printed in red ink). NOTE: In the upper right hand corner of the sample card write BOIL WATER ALERT

8. Who rescinds or takes the system off of the boil water alert?

If the boil water alert was issued by the DWS, only the DWS can rescind or take the system off of boil water. If the alert was issued by the water system, then the water system official(s) can rescind it when they are confident that the system is not contaminated. Again, if you need assistance with contacting the media, we can help.

Remember, we are all in the business of providing an adequate amount of safe drinking water to the people of Mississippi. Even the best operated water systems will eventually have an occasion when a boil water alert is warranted. Don't be afraid to issue the notice yourself or to contact the Division of Water Supply for assistance. We should all be willing to err on the side of protecting the public's health rather than worry about who we will inconvenience or make mad.